



**THE OFFICE OF AGRICULTURE**

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October 2020-Solar ZTA 20-01 – Agricultural Community Concerns/Proposals/Amendments

- We continue to recommend the exclusion of Soil Capability Class I, II, III from siting solar fields.
- Excluding Class I, II, III soils is recommended by the Maryland Farm Bureau for prohibiting solar fields.
- At a minimum, we need to protect productive soils including Class II land capability classification + Prime. We could also limit solar sites on a certain \_\_\_\_\_ % percentage of a properties Class I and II prime soils.

Soil Class	Total Acres	Prime Acres	% Prime
I	2,464	2,464	100%
II	48,391	30,479	63%
III	33,154	-	0%
IV+	19,669	-	0%
Water	2,861	-	0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>106,539</b>	<b>32,943</b>	

- We believe that 1,800 acres is too high for an unproven solar industry in Montgomery County.
- The 1,800 acres of proposed solar sites could be phased in by 3-600-acre phases where each phase would be between three to five years. After each completed phase review the impacts and lessons learned.
- Require a certain amount of MW outside the AR before building solar fields in the AR.
- Baltimore County is ahead of Montgomery County in building 2MW solar sites. They advise doing the following: requiring bonding from the solar company or landowner to require the site clean up after the panels are no longer used. They also believe the concept of agrivoltaic farming will be limited due to insurance companies not wanting animals/people/farm equipment near the panels and inside the fence.

- County farmers are embracing solar installations (mounted on the ground and on rooftops). We recommend that solar fields should only be allowed in the Ag Reserve as an accessory use to farming.
- We support the Solar ZTA increasing the level of accessory solar from 120 to 200 % of on-site energy.
- Increasing the level of accessory solar will help farmers to generate additional electricity for farming operations.
- The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation MALPF allows a solar field up to a total footprint of 5 acres or 5% of the property whatever is less, if the project is approved by the local ag preservation board and then the State MALPF Board of Trustees. One 5-acre solar field = 1MW.
- The OAG believes the MALPF solar field standard represents a good way to demonstrate and achieve solar fields that are accessory to farming and support the farming operations.
- Agrivoltaic farming is a new model for Maryland and we need to learn more about the pilot projects that are out there including working with **Drew Schiavone, Ph.D.** Energy Conservation and Technology Specialist University of Maryland Extension ([extension.umd.edu/energy](http://extension.umd.edu/energy))
- We recommend the solar companies work with the Montgomery County Revenue Authority to incorporate agrivoltaic farming with the grape vineyards that are being planted as part of the Poolesville Economic Development Project. <https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISCAPITAL/Common/Project.aspx?ID=P391801>
- We recommend a new fee mechanism be created where the solar company makes a payment that goes directly to AG Preservation.
- This payment could be based on \$ per MW, or \$ per acre.
- The Solar ZTA should clarify if more than one 2 MW solar field can be installed on larger farms.
- We understand this clarification exists in state law, but we recommend this also be clarified in the ZTA.
- We should encourage Solar Companies to incorporate agrivoltaic farming as part of the solar fields.
- The Solar Companies should decide if they want to install solar panels 20 feet high as currently written.

- Solar panels 20 feet high will require concrete footers for the supporting beams.
- Concrete footers were discouraged by PHED/T&E because it would be more difficult to return solar fields to farming.
- The OAG believes solar panels 20 feet high will promote greater opportunities for agrivoltaic farming.
- If a solar company installs the solar panels 20 feet high, we should be less concerned about soil Classes.